DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 086 044 HE 004 917

AUTHOR	Fincher, Cameron
TITLE	The Purposes and Functions of Policy in Higher Education.
INSTITUTION	Georgia Univ., Athens. Inst. of Higher Education.
PUB DATE	73
NOTE	27p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Institute of Higher Education, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia 30602 ($1.50)
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	*Educational Objectives; *Educational Policy; Essays; *Higher Education; *Policy; *Policy Formation

ABSTRACT

This publication examines the purposes and functions of policy as a conceptual focus for the problems and issues of higher education. Emphasis is placed on the conceptual difficulties of policy, distinctive features of policy, and policy functions and issues. The major contention suggests that the purpose of policy is to provide a general rationale for the specific functions of programs, plans, and decisions. The degree to which that rationale is explicit will vary with the area or level of policy, but some degree of intelligent structure must be given the process whereby programs, plans, and decisions are implemented. (Author/MJM)

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THE PURPOSES AND FUNCTIONS OF POLICY

By CAMERON FINCHER

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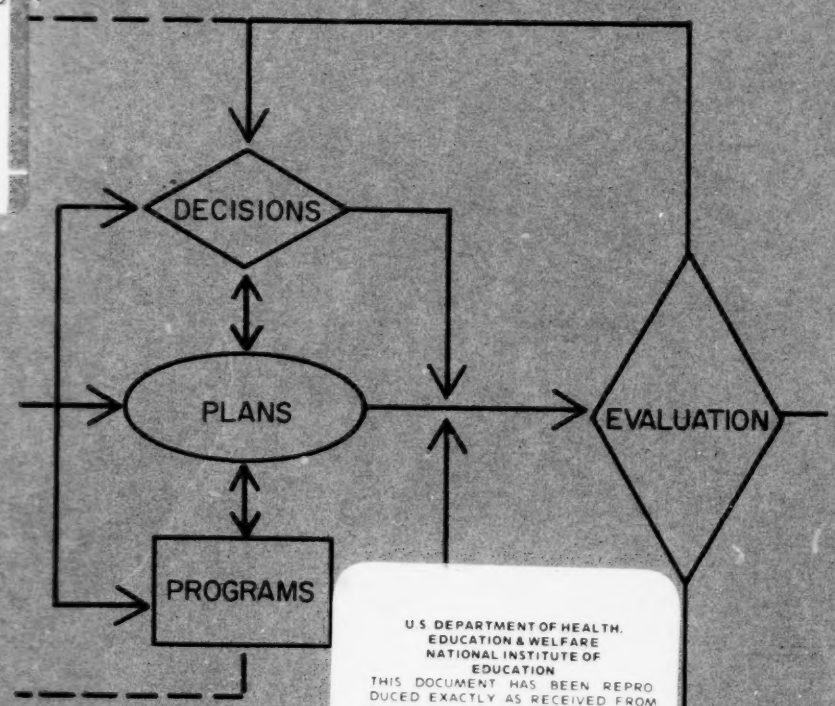

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THE PURPOSE AND FUNCTIONS OF POLICY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

The current concern for policy in higher education represents a major conceptual shift in interest and emphasis. Such shifts occur periodically in most areas of thought and discussion and are most noticeable when they are seen as a radical departure from a more familiar point of view.

The shift in conceptual focus to policy is understood most readily as a shift from programs as a primary vehicle for the accomplishment of national or institutional goals. The concern for policy represents a disillusionment with massive or large scale efforts during the sixties to develop programs and projects that could cope with the problems and issues of that decade. Federal programs such as Head Start, Upward Bound, and Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act have been subjected to intense, often hostile, criticism with the strong implication that they have not met the expectations of either their proponents, the federal government, or the general public.[1]

These programs may or may not be judged effective in the eventual perspective that will come with a later vantage point. The conceptual shift simply means that there is now a search for better ways of dealing with the complexities of the situation. As so often the case, a better way of solving problems begins with a reconceptualization of the problem and a search for better methods of attack. As a

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[1] *For one statement of the issue, see Daniel P. Moynihan, "Policy vs. Program in the '70's," The Public Interest, Summer, 1970, pp. 90-100.*

result, policy is now being advocated as a more viable alternative by permitting decentralized, specialized programs that could respond more directly to specific needs and circumstances. A concern with policy need not reflect changes in the centralization of government either at the federal or state levels. What it does reflect, however, is a recognition that an inadequate attention to policy has not been advantageous to program development. The current crisis in higher education may be interpreted to no small extent as a failure to develop programs and projects that could meet the expectations of the publics served by the nation's institutions of higher education. The failure of these programs is due, in part, to the lack of clarification in the major policy issues confronting the nation and to the inconsistent application of those policies to the institutions that must provide the programs needed.

The intent of this publication is to examine the purpose and functions of policy as a conceptual focus for the problems and issues of higher education. The clarification of policy issues would seem directly dependent upon a better understanding of *policy* itself. The nature, uses, and limitations of policy are not adequately understood and there is little evidence that educational leaders are any better prepared to debate policy than they were to handle the programmatic trials-and-errors of the sixties. That debate is nonetheless in full swing. In 1973 over 22 million dollars was proposed in the national budget for "policy research" and a National Institute for Education had been established with full expectation that it would address itself to policy issues confronting the nation. Indeed, judged by frequency of usage alone, the term *policy* has become a crucial component of the educator's ideational armament with which to face the struggles of the seventies. To make that struggle more intelligent, a more sophisticated appreciation of *policy* would appear in definite order.

THE CONCEPTUAL DIFFICULTIES OF POLICY

The conceptual shift to policy represents, to no small extent, a return to first principles -- a concern with philosophical, historical, and sociocultural underpinnings as opposed to direct action through programs and projects. Should this shift be no more than a retreat to philosophical debate, however, it will be especially tragic. There is a disillusionment with massive programs as such, but the discontent should provoke a more constructive response than verbal quibbling.

Because of its abstract nature, policy will be difficult for many educators to debate. The rush to debate the content, substance, or advantages of specific policies will leave many impatient with the form and functions of *policy* per se. Yet, there is serious reason to believe a similar haste in the sixties is responsible for the failure of numerous programs and projects. For example, the Education Professions Development Act (EPDA) produced an impressive array of programs and activities that were developed within the Bureau of Educational Personnel Development. The thrust of these EPDA programs has been to improve the qualifications of educational personnel who serve low income and minority groups. As commendable as the thrust of the programs has been, however, there has been an absence of concern with policy. No rationale was developed that would designate the objectives, priorities, and strategies of the programs and activities funded under the Act. There was no effort to analyze systematically the problems that would limit the effectiveness of personnel working with low income and minority groups, no critical examination of previous or present arrangements for training such personnel, and no rationale for the forms of "change" or "innovation" that were advocated so frequently by the Bureau. In brief, the problems and issues underlying the

programs were not critically examined and no effort was made to formulate policy that would undergird such programs.[2]

The need for a better understanding of policy has been heavily underscored by the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, the AAAS Assembly on University Goals and Governance, and the HEW Task Force on Higher Education.[3] The Carnegie Commission has identified a number of critical problems and issues that must be resolved through a more effective use of policy. The Assembly on University Goals and Governance has given good credence to the need for renewal while the HEW Task Force makes an even stronger plea for reform. But whether the various commissions and committees are seeking revised policy for purposes of stability, continued growth, or change for change's sake, the purpose and functions of policy have not been clearly explicated.

The shaping of public policy -- and its confusion -- may be witnessed, to good advantage, in the hearings, floor debates, and committee reports that preceded the enactment of the Education Amendments Act of 1972. That public policy does not coalesce

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[2]*See Windows to the Bureaucracy, Washington, D. C.: National Advisory Council on Education Professions Development, 1972.*

[3]*Clark Kerr has given an overview of the Commission's work in "Policy Concerns for the Future" in Dyckman C. Vermilye (Ed.) The Expanded Campus: Current Issues in Higher Education, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1972, pp. 3-21; the work of other commissions or task forces is found in Assembly on University Goals and Governance, A First Report, Cambridge, Mass.: American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1971 and HEW Task Force, Report on Higher Education, Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1971.*

upon legislative enactment is demonstrated quite well by the administrative action taken on the basis of the Act. The shaping of policy will continue further as the legislation or the ensuing administrative action is subjected to judicial review. It is the iterative process of legislation, administrative action, and judicial review that makes the determination of public policy difficult to follow.

A schematic representation of the public policy-making process is depicted in Figure 1. The formulation of public policy is viewed against a backdrop of central government in which the interaction of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches is seen in relation to public reaction. The inputs to policy formulation are shown simply as a set or matrix of inputs that would include such variables as self-interest, ideology, and public tension. The two major forms of feedback to central government are shown as the somewhat direct route that may be taken through the appellate courts and the broader, more diffuse avenue of organized influence.[4]

Each of the components in Figure 1. could be broken out for further elaboration. As in most flow charts, there is a simplification of the overall process for purposes of explication. Neither the

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[4]*For further discussion of the public policy-making process, see Charles E. Lindblom, The Policy-Making Process, Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968 and his earlier work with David Braybrooke, A Strategy of Decision, New York: Free Press, 1963. The best illustration of the overall process is found in Raymond A. Bauer, Ithiel de Sola Pool, and Lewis A. Dexter, American Business and Public Policy: The Politics of Foreign Trade, New York: Atherton Press, 1964 and a delightful account of "internal dynamics" is given in Aaron Wildavsky, The Politics of the Budgetary Process, Boston: Little, Brown, 1964.*

subtleties of organized influence nor the complexities of appeal can be depicted within the framework, but their importance should be understood. The gist of the chart is to emphasize the extended, cyclic nature of the process and to counter the naive notion that public policy is a governmental decision made at some point in time. It is precisely this continuing cycle that makes a more sophisticated understanding of policy mandatory for those concerned with higher education.

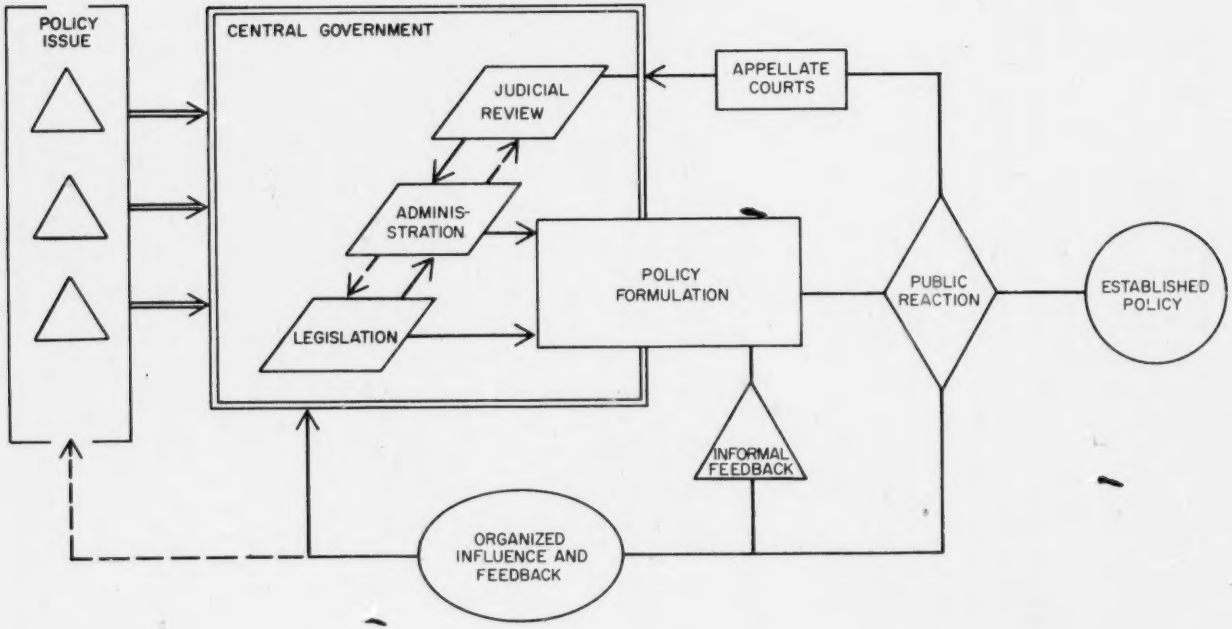
SOME DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF POLICY

Policy may be understood in terms of its purposes and functions, its advantages and limitations, or its special features. The purposes may be both general and specific, but the concept of policy has both a full and a limited meaning that is not always clear. For example, the policies, programs, and functions of government are often used collectively and synonymously. Too often the term is an empty noun that serves only to anchor an area of activity -- such as fiscal and monetary policy, agricultural policy, foreign policy, economic policy, labor policy, and welfare policy. This usage more or less makes the term synonymous with the activity itself.

For a clarification of *policy* in higher education, it is advisable to distinguish quickly between public policy, as reflected in governmental action, and institutional policy, as it reflects the autonomy and independence of our separate colleges and universities. The fact that institutional policy does not follow directly from public policy is a source of considerable confusion. Public institutions may be directly influenced by state or community action, but institutional policy is a derivative of public policy only in the loosest sense. By the same token, public policy is more than an aggregation of institutional policies. An example of

FIGURE I.

THE PUBLIC POLICY-MAKING PROCESS



this confusion may be seen in a national policy of universal access to higher education that has been continuously thwarted by conflicting institutional policies.

To gain a better conceptual grasp of *policy*, it would seem advisable to distinguish carefully between policy on the one hand and administration, legislation, ideology, and theory on the other. In the usage of these terms there are inherent ambiguities and a bit of overlap that should make the contrast helpful. Examples of the distinctions may be drawn more readily for public policy but the implications for institutional policy should be obvious.

Policy Versus Administration

There is a traditional distinction that views administration as the execution of policy with no acknowledgement of an interaction between the two. Some administrators still regard their responsibilities in this light, but such a viewpoint does not consider the influence of administrative decision making on the formulation of policy.

The interaction of administration and policy formulation implies that as an administrative decision becomes an accomplished fact, there is an incremental change in policy as such. This interaction is readily seen in situations where an appeal for administrative decision must travel up the organizational heirarchy and back down again. Each appeal, in some small way, establishes a precedent which may become a guide for future administrative action. The particular point in time when administrative precedent becomes indistinguishable from a change in policy is quite difficult to identify. The interaction of administration and policy, however, need not blur the distinction that is made in classical management literature between policy-making boards and executives who implement policy. At the same time, it is necessary to recognize that

as a decision technology emerges from the management sciences, the policy-making function becomes more important as a focal point in the administrative domain. Administrative decisions not only become more routine but increasingly automated as they are rightly concerned with operational matters.

With specific reference to public policy, it is well to recall V. O. Key's contention that governmental agencies have a tradition, outlook, and policy inclination of their own. Federal agencies may well have "a momentum and a pattern of action that escape direction" as well as an institutional inertia that is quite prevalent.[5] For this reason, policy should not be confused with traditions or points of view that characterize governmental agencies. We should recognize, nonetheless, the propensity some agencies have for revolving personnel and their reputation for unstable operational policies that are dictated by the personal preferences or career objectives of transitory staff. The administrative reorganization of the U. S. Office of Education under the Education Amendments Act of 1972 may be interpreted as a Congressional attempt to cope with just such a problem. The creation of a Division of Education in HEW with an Assistant Secretary responsible for both the Office of Education and the newly established National Institute of Education would seem both an effort to alter certain policy-making activities of the Office of Education and an attempt to make the federal government more responsive to policy issues as seen by Congress.

Policy Versus Legislation

In many discussions of policy it is necessary to recall that the enactment of laws is a reflection

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[5] *V. O. Key, Jr. Politics, Parties, and Pressure Groups, Fourth Edition, New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1958, p. 747.*

of public policy but not its sole expression or determinant. Too frequently, the practical-minded will take the wording of legislation as the only expression of policy while the literal-minded believe policy to be just what the legislation says and nothing more. Such a viewpoint ignores the problems and procedures of interpretation. As in administration, policy both precedes and follows its overt expression in the form of legislation. But because of the ambiguity of policy and its failure to crystallize readily in areas of complex issues, legislation may contribute further to the ambiguity it was supposed to remove.

This would seem especially true of the 1972 legislation dealing with institutional aid, statewide planning, and emergency assistance to institutions in distress. In each case the wording of the legislation would suggest a rather straightforward solution of a policy issue. Yet, the translation of the legislation into administrative action has floundered because of uncertainty as to what national policy on these three issues should be. In tying cost-of-education payments to basic and supplemental grants of student assistance, the legislation fails to clarify the national policy for financial aid to those colleges and universities presumably educating the majority of low income and minority group members in postsecondary education. Efforts to encourage better statewide planning for the expansion and improvement of postsecondary education were delayed because of the uncertainty concerning planning as opposed to planning-and-coordination. Assistance to institutions in financial distress is unclear because of what seems to be direct contradiction with several other national policies that would encourage economic efficiency in institutional operation.

Yet, the Education Amendments Act of 1972 gives a clearer indication of public policy than the Higher Education Act of 1965 now does. The intentions of Congress in 1965 were very much a part of

the discussion in extending the various authorizations five years later. As a result of what Congress believed to be administrative ignorance of public policy, certain sections of the Education Amendments Act are more explicit and directive than we would ordinarily find legislation to be. Granting the many shifts that have occurred in policy itself, it would still follow that the cycling of the 1965 Act through the ensuing programs and projects, with the opportunity to test in federal courts, and through the legislative corridors again gives a better understanding of both Congressional intent and the substance of policy itself. Where the intent and form of the legislation remain the same, as in assistance to developing institutions, we may conclude that public policy is, for the moment, established and accepted.

Policy Versus Ideology

The role of pressure groups, special interest groups, and other politically active agencies is a necessary part of the national effort to formulate policy, but the viewpoints expounded and promoted should not be confused with policy as such. Groups that mediate the interests of the general public and the aspirations of various organizations necessarily supply a fund of coherent proposals and viewpoints that are policy-oriented. To refer to these viewpoints as ideology need not be pejorative. The realities of life require a supplier of organized, preformed ideas that consider the public interest in a particular problem area. The lobbyist plays an essential role in legislation and the professional organization has a much-valued role as a supplier or broker of ideas, suggestions, and criticisms.

Yet, it is the promotional campaign, publicity drive, or rhetorical barrage that is too often confused with policy. As necessary as lobbies, information agencies, and national secretariats are,

they should be regarded as a part of the policy-forming process and not as the embodiment of policy. To cite V. O. Key again, the importance of group interests and their stake in public policy is clear. Private or professional associations are indeed engaged in the "politics of policy" but public policy is not originated or consummated with the opening of a national office in Washington.[6]

For higher education, the role of ideology has not been as blatant as in other sectors, but its importance should not be denied. The months preceding the passage of the Education Amendments Act suggested a dearth of consistent, appealing ideology that was supportive of the amendments. Whereas in previous years there had been an ideological appeal to national defense, trained manpower in crucial occupations, and international competition, as in the space race, no sustaining appeal was heard in 1972. The major organizations housed at the National Center for Higher Education were severely criticized by Congressional leaders for not providing a suitable ideological gusto for the passage of the Act. Some organizations promoted with good protective instinct the passage of certain segments but did not move beyond the range of their immediate interests. The one ideological thread that ran through the many sections and passages was handled with reluctance by the national secretariat. This was the continuing upward thrust of minority groups and the necessity of their cultural accommodation.

Policy Versus Theory

The differences between policy and theory are both more subtle and more interesting than those

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[6] *Key, p. 23. See also David B. Truman, The Governmental Process: Political Interest and Public Opinion, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951.*

between policy and administration, legislation, or ideology. Theory has a diversity of meanings but there are usages of the term where a discussion of both similarities and differences should clarify the meaning of policy.

When theory is used as a set of plausible or generally accepted principles that are offered for the explanation of specific phenomena, the similarity with policy is quite noticeable. Indeed, the way in which general theories in the fields of economics and foreign relations are used makes it quite difficult to distinguish that usage from the broader conceptions of policy. A theory of supply and demand, for example, may reflect only the policies that have been adopted by various sectors of the economy.

In its more systematic usage, theory is regarded as a set of hypotheses or laws that are fairly well established and have broad but useful applications. When used in this manner, both theory and policy may be regarded as a general, overall, rational canopy under which more specific concepts of action, procedure, and operation can be housed. Both should cover a range of past situations and conditions while suggesting ways in which new situations and conditions can be met. In this way, both theory and policy would be expected to "explain" certain events that take place.

Other relationships between theory and policy are more difficult to depict. To a certain extent, policy may be the "theory" that best accounts for administrative and legislative action. At the same time, policy often draws heavily from established theory in certain fields but it does not achieve the degree of comprehensiveness or formality that theory is capable of providing. Economic, political, and social theory would seem to weigh heavily in many recent attempts to shape or mold public policy. Economic concepts of productivity and efficiency

have been used with increasing frequency but may not provide the theoretical base that sound policy would require.

For the most part, theory inputs to policy formulation in higher education have been both fragmented and spasmodic. The theoretical bases for most public policy would not seem extensive, and efforts to introduce theory into policy discussion are not encouraged because theory is not well regarded. Social theory, in particular, would seem to suffer from reputational difficulties among many persons concerned with policy formulation. Harold Orlans, for example, has taken an unusually critical look at the role of the behavioral and social sciences in the formation of public policy. Not only does he accuse social scientists of a lack of scientific objectivity in policy issues but he chastizes both the scientists and their associations for a lack of policy sophistication.[7]

Yet, the unencouraging results of federal programs for disadvantaged and minority groups must rest in part on the shaky theoretical bases for such programs. Programs for early childhood education have been based on theoretical preferences that had the best of intentions but a lesser degree of empirical support. In much the same manner, the enthusiasm of other federal programs suggests an opportune grasping of supportive theory rather than a critical examination of its relevance for the kinds of programs it presumed to support. The optimism, for example, of compensatory education programs may have precluded a wiser choice of theoretical insights to their possible implications. Some programs did indeed reinvent the wheel but did not design an axle.

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[7] *Harold Orlans. Contracting for Knowledge. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1973.*

POLICY FUNCTIONS AND ISSUES

If the purpose of policy is to provide a general, overall, rational canopy for specific actions, procedures, or operations, it should follow that the specific functions of policy are decisions, plans, and programs. Implicit in the formulation of policy is a series of assumptions concerning the situations and conditions under which decisions are made, plans are constructed, and programs are developed. Decisions, plans, and programs therefore would seem the specific, concrete actions that would logically follow from policy as a body of agreements, commitments, assumptions, understandings, or other antecedent conditions under which action occurs.

Policy therefore is not so much a sufficient condition for the execution of plans, decisions, and programs as it is a necessary condition for the meaningful structure of such actions or activities. It is a logical antecedent to such events but may not precede in time its logical consequences. As a result, policy is more often in a state of becoming than an accomplished fact.

Plans, decisions, and programs as functions of policy are depicted in Figure 2. There the functions of policy may be seen against a backdrop of administrative action in which policy formulation plays a dominant role. As in the public policy-making process, the interactive and feedback mechanisms are essential. Decisions, plans, and programs are not necessarily independent of each other and are not functions solely of policy. The extent to which they are determined by policy, however, is a major test of the adequacy and effectiveness of policy within the organizational structure.

The components of evaluation and policy review have not been well articulated in the past but show evidence of better development in the future. The current concern with evaluation research and the

recent infatuation with policy research suggest that both will receive increasing attention. The specific location of both activities, however, may be suspect. As shown, Figure 2. would suggest that evaluation is a component of administrative action while policy review is a process exterior to the area.

The intent of Figure 2., nonetheless, is to depict decisions, plans, and programs as reasonably direct functions of policy and to suggest something of the interrelated complexities of a process in which decisions, plans, and programs not only reflect policy but contribute substantially and formally to its formulation. As a rationale, policy may be either explicit or implicit; it may be unwritten or well codified and documented. In any event, it should be the logical canopy under which the major functions and activities of organizations and institutions take place. As such, policy is instrumental in the design, development, and implementation of organizational or institutional action. Policy may not be final, absolute, perfect, or complete, but it should be suggestive or indicative of constructive action and it should permit plans, decisions, and programs that are more open, better informed, realistic, and intelligent.

Plans As A Function Of Policy

Plans may be defined as an explicit way of structuring future decisions and actions. Abraham Kaplan has written that a plan is "a configuration of goals . . . consistent with each other . . . grounded in the facts of the case, and specified in terms of an action sequence expected to lead to their attainment." The conjunction of ends and means is essential and unless the two are reciprocally determined, action will be directed to limited objectives that have no meaning beyond themselves.[8]

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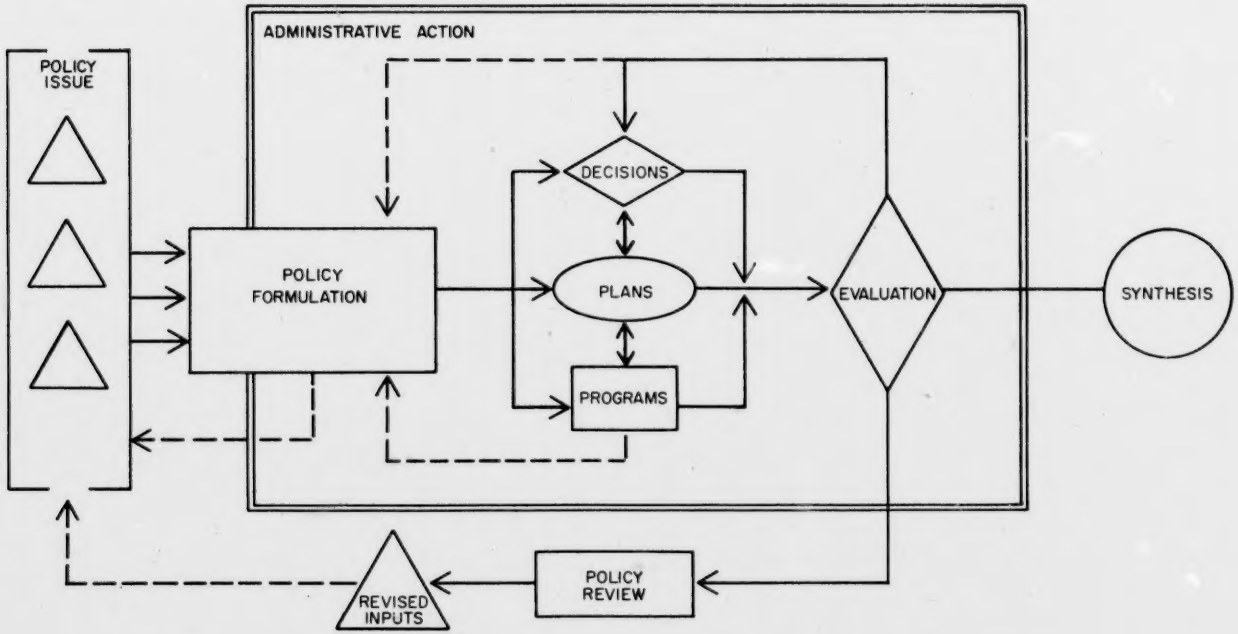
[8] *Abraham Kaplan, The Conduct of Inquiry, San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Co., 1964, p. 404.*

FIGURE 2.
THE FUNCTIONS OF POLICY



Another way of saying this is that plans are structural in the sense of being organized expectations of what is to be accomplished. To designate what we would accomplish requires that we have some logical framework in which to do so. An attractive campus plan, for example, is undoubtedly worked out in a policy setting that precludes the notion that chaos is preferential. Only when there is some kind of policy to make the campus attractive, does a campus plan become meaningful.

Campus development plans then are the obvious example. The construction of physical facilities requires a stepwise progression with detailed explication of the various phases. While not so obvious, the development of academic programs and public service activities also requires some form of explicit plan that would enable observers to see the next unfolding steps and to anticipate something other than mere continuance.

Plans may be distinguished from policy in several ways. For the most part, policy is contextual while plans are focal; one is background while the other is figure. There is a further distinction in that plans may be physically represented in models whereas policies almost never are. A scale model of the campus plan, for example, would be most helpful in discussing the future development of a college. A scaled model of the policies that would facilitate that growth and development would be a contradiction.

In discussing plans that have been developed in keeping with policy, the process of planning as such is strongly implied. Planning as an activity has an intricate relationship with policy formulation in that the two may continuously interact, with both evolving over a period of time and exerting mutual influence over the other. Policy must be stable enough for a plan to be developed, prepared, or constructed. After their development, plans may

influence policy but not as directly or immediately as the planning process itself. Once developed, however, plans may become peremptory and stultify the formulation of more effective policy.

Decisions As A Function Of Policy

As a necessary condition for decisions, policy represents the fund of knowledge and comprehension from which decision makers draw in the operational judgments and choices that are made on a routine basis. For that reason, policy may not be as easily distinguished from decisions as plans and programs are. As mentioned previously, policy not only precedes administrative decisions but follows from them. Most administrators do indeed influence policy as they act directly in problem-solving situations, but administrative decisions, even on policy matters, should not be confused with the substance of policy itself. It is possible to describe in behavioristic terms much that occurs in a decision-making situation without adequately involving the substance and boundaries of policy.

Despite the need to understand how policy decisions are made, it does not follow that policy formulation must be subsumed under decision theory.[9] At the present time decision theory must make certain assumptions that are ill-adapted for policy formulation. The psychological task of constructing and comparing several alternatives of actions has proven to be more difficult than first expected. When there is sufficient complexity in a decision situation, the limitations of memory and the difficulties of considering the various alternatives

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[9] *For a single, quick reference to decision theory, see Robert C. Weisselberg and Joseph G. Cowley, The Executive Strategist: An Armchair Guide to Scientific Decision-Making, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969.*

become evident. More important, however, it would appear that decision theory does not have the degree of comprehensiveness that policy requires. At the present time, decision theory is able to handle only behavior at a much lower level of complexity.

A major reason for regarding policy as a conceptual framework in which decisions are made is that the degree of participation and involvement varies between the two. The strong push for participatory democracy in higher education has led many groups, such as faculty members and students, to believe that they should be actively involved in the decision-making that directly affects them. A more realistic expectation could be realized by their active involvement in policy formulation. Decisions must be subjected to routines, schedules, and other operational constraints that policy cannot be subjected to in the same way. A realistic input to policy would be most feasible, provided an adequate understanding of the policy-forming process could be developed on the part of those who would participate.

Another reason concerns the more urgent nature of decisions as opposed to the deliberative nature of policy. Because of their urgency, however, decisions frequently outrun policy and lead to a failure of policy as well as to a lack of planning. In any event, it is well to mention that both decisions and policy can be made by default as easily as direct action. A "policy" of not making decisions hastily can undermine the authority of both policy and decision.

Programs As A Function Of Policy

The development of programs and projects within the framework of policy may be the least understood aspect of the policy process. Policy has not been construed in such a manner that it would guide, shape, and sustain the programs and projects that

would produce the results and outcomes that are desired. Policy is often implicit in certain features of program development but with little expectation that it will become more explicit as the program achieves some measure of success. More often, there is a questionable effort to formulate an acceptable degree of policy after the completion of the program. The formulation of policy in such a manner is seldom satisfactory.

As a logical consequence of policy, programs are expected to have a designated period of time and a specified location that plans and decisions do not always have. Programs are different also in calling for a more complex organization of time, personnel, equipment, materials, and facilities. For this reason, programs and projects may be impervious to changing policy needs. This is especially true in higher education where academic programs frequently acquire a kind of functional autonomy and succeed in perpetuating themselves despite policy, plans, and decisions to the contrary.

The success or effectiveness of programs and projects in higher education should not obscure the logical priority of policy. The degree to which policy is explicit will vary with the area or level of program complexity, but the need for policy considerations is nonetheless important. The better the policy-making process can be articulated in meaningful ways, the more effective the programs and projects generated within that framework should be.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this publication has been to clarify a small portion of the confusion that surrounds the issue of *policy* in higher education. The issue represents an important shift in conceptual focus and, if Moynihan is correct, will be a

dominant one in the decade of the seventies. But if that debate is to be fruitful, there must be a better understanding of *policy* than is now evident.

Because policy is not synonymous with legislation, rules, and regulations, there is an inherent amount of vagueness to its formulation. Because policy both precedes and follows administrative action, it cannot be neatly separated from administrative understanding and intent. Nor can policy be equated to the ideological climate that would encourage and sustain its formulation. In its similarity to theory, policy should meet certain criteria of comprehensiveness and formality, but the different purposes and functions should be recognized.

The major contention therefore is that the purpose of *policy* is to provide a general rationale for the specific functions of programs, plans, and decisions. The degree to which that rationale is explicit will vary with the area or level of policy, but some degree of intelligent structure must be given the process whereby programs, plans, and decisions are implemented. The better this structure can be articulated in meaningful ways, the more effective the policy-forming process should become.

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As a service to other institutions and educational agencies, the Institute of Higher Education publishes a series of occasional monographs and newsletters dealing with selected topics of general interest in higher education. The purpose of the series is to inform administrators and faculty members in two-year and four-year colleges of recent trends and developments in areas such as administration, curriculum planning, program evaluation, professional development, or teaching effectiveness. The specific intent may be to report research findings, to interpret general trends or recent events, or to suggest new lines of inquiry into various problems.

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